

# Students Are More than Single Scores: *Adopting a Diagnostic Approach to Assessment*

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# Introduction

Fundamentally, Tutor Doctor Lakeway's assessments are diagnostic rather than simple screeners. Why would you want a diagnostic assessment? For diverse districts with many English Language Learners and socio-economically low populations, many students are multiple years below grade level.

Screeners simply tell you what you already know: **students are struggling**. They are designed for administrators for accountability purposes. They are structured to be quick assessments.

**Diagnostics tell you why.** They provide detailed data so teachers can make key instructional decisions that take learning to the next level. In today's diverse classrooms, teachers need help. With so many subjects to teach and classrooms of 25+ students with diverse needs, they don't have time to diagnose why each student is struggling.

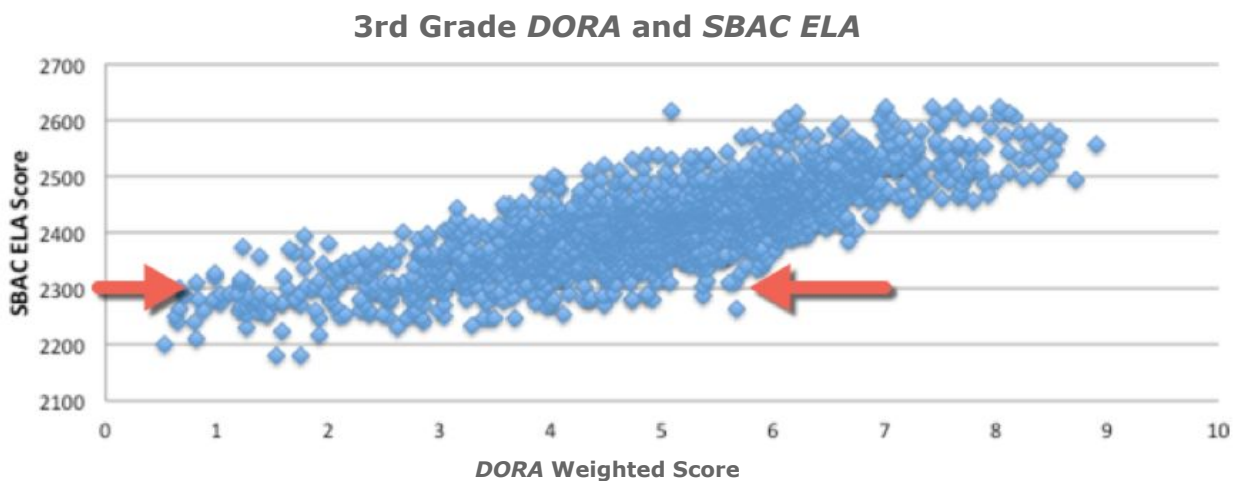
Tutor Doctor Lakeway has partnered with Let's Go Learn who can do this because their longer test provides granular data. Unlike a 20-minute screener, *DORA* takes the time to get detailed data. In addition, diagnostic data also provides administrators with accountability reports.

With Tutor Doctor Lakeway and Let's Go Learn, you get the best of both worlds: granular data to pinpoint learning gaps and instructional points for teachers and accountability reports for administrators.

*See Appendix A for product feature comparisons between DORA and two leading screeners.*

# Students Are More than Single Scores

Below is a graph depicting the limitations of single-scaled scores (see California's Common Core data below). We took SBAC ELA scaled scores and mapped them to *DORA*, our reading diagnostic.



Consider these 3rd-grade students who each received a scaled score of approximately 2300. If we take a closer look at five students who scored 2300, the scale score tells us those students all appear to be performing at the same level.

If we look at their skills as measured by *DORA*, we get a far more nuanced view. The scale score says they are all the same, but a diagnostic claims otherwise. In addition, Let's Go Learn's scores are reported as grade levels! This makes Let's Go Learn easier for parents, teachers, and students to understand.

*What score would be clearer and more actionable to a student: "You are a 650" or "You're spelling at a 2nd-grade level and your phonics skills are at a 4th-grade level"?*

Five students with approximately the same 2300 SBAC ELA scaled score

Student	Profile	Decoding			PA	Vocab	SP	Comp	WS	SBAC ELA
		HF	WR	PH		VO		CO		
#1	B	2.5	1.17	0.83	0.22	4.83	1.17	0.5	1.64	2299
#2	C	3.5	5.5	4.5		3.83	1.83	1.5	3.25	2302
#3	F	1.83	0.5	2.17	0.89	6.71	1.5	3.17	2.58	2303
#4	C	3.5	6.17	4.5		3.83	2.5	1.5	3.44	2303
#5	G	3.83	3.83	4.5		2.83	1.83	3.83	3.15	2304

**HF-** High-Frequency Words

**SP-** Spelling

**WR-** Word Recognition

**CO-** Comprehension

**PH-** Phonics (*each score corresponds to a different phonics level, i.e. beginning sounds, short vowel, etc.*)

**WS-** Weighted Total *DORA* Score

**PA-** Phonemic Awareness

**SBAC ELA-** State Scaled Score for ELA

**VO-** Vocabulary

When we examine five students with approximately **the same 2300 SBAC ELA scaled score**, we see a dramatic difference in intervention needs. The data above informs the following summary:

<b>STUDENT 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a sight word reader</li> <li>• Has many sight words memorized</li> <li>• Has minimal phonics skills</li> <li>• Has very low comprehension strategies skills</li> </ul>
<b>STUDENT 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require some decoding support (sight words and phonics)</li> <li>• Primarily comprehension strategies need strengthening</li> </ul>
<b>STUDENT 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs significant decoding support</li> <li>• Scored many years below in all decoding areas</li> </ul>
<b>STUDENT 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require some decoding support (sight words and phonics)</li> <li>• Primarily comprehension strategies need strengthening</li> </ul>
<b>STUDENT 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily needs vocabulary support</li> <li>• Has strong decoding and comprehension strategies skills</li> </ul>

# Actionable Data for Teachers in the Classroom

DORA provides accurate data for each student that is specific enough to show exactly what phonics skill(s) the student needs to work on next.

Phonics Principles Mastered				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some Beg. Letter Sounds /a/, /b/, /c/...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Short Vowel Sounds den, nap, fun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Long Vowel Sounds kite, cake, mile	<input type="checkbox"/> Vowel Digraphs coat, team, train	<input type="checkbox"/> Diphthongs Joy, cloud, aunt
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Most/all beg. letter sounds /a/, /b/, /c/...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consonant Blend snap, crisp, splat	<input type="checkbox"/> Consonant Digraphs chips, cloth, shed	<input type="checkbox"/> R-Controlled Vowels dark, form, pert	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Syllable jumping, structure, station

①

②

For example, this report excerpt shows this student needs to begin with additional instruction and support focused on Consonant Digraphs (1), followed by Vowel Digraphs (2).

Further, this profile is not based on one test item per skill. Sets are tested with ten items per skill in phonics. This report is also available in a classroom view, allowing educators to easily create flexible data-based groups.

## Conclusion



Over the last fifteen years, the availability of online assessments has continued to grow. Because of these options, schools have the opportunity to make well-informed decisions based on their data needs and assessment plans.

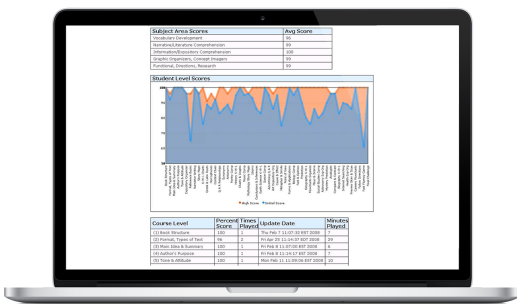
Today, schools no longer need to settle for just a screener. An online screener is more manageable than the paper-and-pencil screeners used in the past, but that is not the only consideration. If schools are interested in truly data-driven instruction, *DORA* provides a full-blown diagnostic assessment that will drive your complete reform efforts at the district, school, and classroom levels.

Don't hamstring your reform efforts before you start. You would never choose to go to a doctor who had only a thermometer for a tool; you would choose the one who used a stethoscope, a thermometer, a blood pressure reader, and an otoscope. Just like the latter, *DORA* provides educators the appropriate tools to make a well-rounded diagnosis. We look forward to helping you achieve success!

# Appendix A

## Feature Comparison: Let's Go Learn vs. Leading Screeners

Feature	<i>DORA</i>	Scholastic <i>SRI</i>	RenLearn <i>Star</i> Assessment
Used as a Screener	✓	✓	✓
Used as a Diagnostic	✓	✗	✗
Total Test Time	20-60 minutes	20-35 minutes	20 minutes
Single Scaled Score	✓	✓	✓
Lexile	Equiv.	✓	✗
Breakout Diagnostic Scores	✓	✗	✗
Reading Sub-Test Scores	7	✗	✗
Intervention Profile Groups	✓	✗	✗
Use for Daily/Weekly Classroom Grouping	✓	✗	✗
Placement into Scope & Sequences Skill	✓	✗	✗
Multiple Interfaces Based Grade	✓	✗	✗
Criterion-Referenced	✓	✗	✗
Norm-Referenced	✗	✗	✓



## A Word from Let's Go Learn Co-Founder and CEO



After my son was born and while my wife was pregnant with our daughter, I realized I wanted to shift my work efforts to a field that had much greater social benefits. Perhaps it was the extreme lack of sleep, or maybe my frustration at my son always grabbing the flashcards I was using to teach him and eating them. Nonetheless, having an entrepreneurial spirit already, I started researching educational business ideas. During this process, I was surprised to find that my soon-to-become best friend Rick McCallum ran the reading credential program at U.C. Berkeley. Previously, I had thought of him only as someone I liked to punch during Karate training. It was on a break during a weekend Karate summer camp that I shared with him an early business plan for Let's Go Learn (something like version 20 out of the eventual 45). Rick looked at me and said, "Richard, do you know what I do at Berkeley?" I ignorantly replied, "Hmmm... You teach English or something?"

From that moment, we plunged forward, and I've never really looked back. In October 2000, I incorporated Let's Go Learn and quit my comfortable job at Adobe Systems. We started development, secured funding, lost funding in the dot-com crash, and persevered until we launched our first assessment in September of 2001. At the time, our first assessment was called "The LGL Reading Assessment." Later, as our marketing matured, we named it *DORA* (Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment).

During the initial years, we grew cautiously but amazingly; we always seemed to find the right people at the right time. Today we have over six assessments and seven instructional products. The passion we all have for what we do keeps me personally energized every day. It has been 18 years so far and I still love going to work. And I love squeezing it in during the evenings when my family and I are watching reruns of *The Office* and I can have my laptop in my lap.

Today, of course, things have become a lot more serious. As we expand into more schools and deal with larger deployments, I have realized that every decision we make is critical. The wrong partner can be devastating. With that said, we are practicing what we preach. We want schools to use diagnostic data to drive their instruction, so we are using our own data to guide our development and sales and marketing. As we grow, our goal is to continue to support our customers like a small business but also scale like a large business.

Fortunately, we have many smart people working at Let's Go Learn. We are using lots of great technologies to make our development processes and customer support methodologies easier. This benefits everyone, including our partners, our customers, and ourselves. Expect more great things in the next few years. My goal is to keep having fun at work as well as in my personal life. Thank you for reading this personal story!

Richard Capone  
CEO & Co-Founder of Let's Go Learn